

February 13, 2002

To: Delta Protection Commission Agriculture Committee

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Action on Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D)
(For Consideration and Possible Action by Agriculture Committee)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION:

The Agriculture Committee should consider the following recommendations:

- The Commission should designate the Agriculture Committee Steering Committee to oversee preparation of an application to the Secretary for Agriculture for creation of a Delta RC&D. The Commission would review the application prior to submittal. The applications are due mid-October 2002.
- The Commission should direct staff to assist the Steering Committee in setting up meetings and preparing the application to the Secretary for Agriculture.
- The Steering Committee should invite each of the Delta RCDs to participate on the Steering Committee (Ulati, Suisun, Dixon, Yolo, Lower Cosumnes, Florin, San Joaquin, and Contra Costa).
- The Steering Committee should host two additional larger, public meetings to educate the Delta community about the RC&D program and its goals, and to seek community support for a Delta RC&D.
- The Steering Committee should seek the support of five Delta Boards of Supervisors, County Farm Bureaus, federal representatives, State representatives, and other key groups.
- The Steering Committee would recommend membership of the Council.
- The Steering Committee would recommend a geographic boundary that includes at least the Primary Zone and the agricultural lands south of Isleton in the Secondary Zone. The Steering Committee will evaluate adding additional areas in the Secondary Zone and beyond to the geographic scope.
- The Steering Committee should develop a list of possible projects to pursue in the Delta focused on:
 - Development of new economic uses of agricultural land (such as agri-tourism),
 - Development of new markets and new uses for Delta crops that provide ecosystem benefits (small grains),

- Development of new Delta crops that would support new sustainable uses (e.g. biomass-fueled power plants, ethanol plants).
- Analyze economic changes in the community and develop offsetting strategies.
- Enhancement of community economic viability through historic preservation and reuse of outdated facilities.

BACKGROUND:

The Delta Protection Commission asked the Agriculture Committee to consider and report back to the Commission on the proposal to request approval of a Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) in the Legal Delta.

The RC&D is a federal program, with over 350 RC&D nationwide). The purpose of the program is to provide resources to rural communities to address important issues associated with community health and economic well being. The concept of a Delta RC&D was raised and recommended by the San Joaquin County Resource Conservation District.

If an RC&D is approved, the Department of Agriculture would permanently fund an office and staff within a limited budget of approximately \$100,000. The core staff would work to develop additional funding that can be used for projects, consultants, and staff. That staff would be hired by NRCS in an open recruitment process to work for a new non-profit Delta Resource Conservation and Development Council.

OUTREACH MEETINGS:

The Agriculture Committee agreed to set up a series of meetings in the five Delta Counties to discuss this proposal and to receive comments from interested parties. Invited participants included: County Supervisor/Commissioner, Ag Commissioner, local land trusts, Resource Conservation District board members, and District Conservationists. Agriculture Committee members were in attendance at four of the five meetings (*see attached lists of attendees.*)

ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETINGS:

- There is interest in defining the boundary of the RC&D.
- The RCDs want a RC&D program to complement on-going programs and not compete with those programs.
- The boundary of the Legal Delta does not "match" the boundaries of the RCDs (*see attached map of RCDs*).

FINDINGS FROM THE MEETINGS:

- The RC&D program is not well known, or understood. The meetings provided a chance to educate participants about the history, purpose, and goals of the program.
- The RC&D Council would be created as a **non-profit entity**.

- RC&D Council is locally driven. Neither federal nor State agencies would be voting members of the Council. State and federal agency representatives can be non-voting members of the Council.
- The RC&D Council does not compete with RCDs for funding.
- The RC&D would use its application as its work plan until a new plan is prepared. (one to two years).
- The local groups would like to help determine the final geographic boundaries of the program area. For example, the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is very involved in watershed planning and restoration and would like the entire area of the watersheds of Kirker Creek and Marsh Creek included in a program boundary. In addition, some of the Resource Conservation Districts could be bifurcated if the Legal Delta boundary is used to create the program boundary.

COMMITMENT BY THE DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION:

The Commission staff would be expected to help organize additional public outreach meetings to help define membership, boundary issues, and define potential projects. This would entail preparing and mailing meeting notices, attending meeting, taking and preparing meeting notes. In addition, Commission staff would assist with preparation of the draft application for review and approval by the Steering Committee and the Delta Protection Commission. This would likely require a commitment of approximately eight hours of staff time per month over the next eight months. Staff would be assisted by Natural Resources Conservation Service staff.

TIMELINE:

February 28, 2002:

Agriculture Committee considers recommendation to full Commission re: appointment of Steering Committee to proceed with preparation of application for Delta RC&D.

March 28, 2002:

Delta Protection Commission to consider Agriculture Committee recommendation re: appointment of Steering Committee to proceed with preparation of application for Delta RC&D.

Spring and Summer 2002:

Steering Committee hosts two additional public meetings re: Delta RC&D.
Steering Committee seeks support from Boards of Supervisors, State and federal legislators, Farm Bureaus, and other groups.

August 15, 2002:

Agriculture Committee reviews and adopts application for Delta RC&D.

September 26, 2002:

Delta Protection Commission reviews and adopts application for Delta RC&D.

October 25, 2002:

Application due to Secretary of Agriculture.

Possible Delta RC&D Council Projects:

(as discussed at the five RC&D meetings)

- Inventory of Delta Agricultural Land
- Subsidence Control/Remediation Actions:
 - Program to Support Carbon Sequestration
 - Rice Straw placement in subsided areas
 - Grow Rice
- Ethanol Production
 - Beets
 - Corn
- Enhanced Levee Stability
- Education Programs and Facilities (Pacific Flyway Center; Delta Science Center)
- Biomass-Fueled Small Energy Facilities
- Marketing of Delta as an Agricultural Region
- Analysis of the Economic Impacts to the Delta of Land Conversion to Habitat or Water Storage or Conveyance
- Resource Guide (for landowners/managers)
- Protection of and Reuse of Historic Buildings in Delta Communities
- Agri-Tourism
- Recreation
- Address Irrigation/Water Circulation Issues for Duck Clubs and Agriculture in Yolo Bypass

List of Resource Conservation Districts within the Legal Delta:

- Contra Costa County Resource Conservation District
- Sacramento County:
 - Lower Cosumnes Resource Conservation District
 - Florin Resource Conservation District
 - *Note: Sloughhouse Resource Conservation District is east of the Legal Delta*
- San Joaquin Resource Conservation District
- Solano County:
 - Suisun Resource Conservation District
 - Ulatis Resource Conservation District
 - Dixon Resource Conservation District
- Yolo County:
 - Dixon Resource Conservation District
 - Yolo Resource Conservation District

